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ABSTRACT

Included in this review of the literature on grade retention are annotations for 13 articles supporting nonpromotion policies, 13 articles refuting nonpromotion policies, and 5 articles arguing that both policies result in undesirable consequences. Articles are identified as being: (1) original research comparing students retained with students promoted; (2) original research comparing retained students' achievement before and after retention; (3) true experimental designs comparing the achievement of randomly promoted or retained students who were all potential retainees; or (4) nonoriginal research such as literature reviews and summaries of school programs. Results are summarized in the final section. It is concluded that, while social promotion has been a major contributing factor in the graduation of unskilled high school students, most teachers are correct in their reluctance to retain a student in grade. Besides retention's having negative social effects, the student often receives no special help and merely repeats his original bad experience. While funding may be difficult to obtain, mimimum standards of achievement should be developed for grade promotions and high school graduation, and remedial bridging programs should be established for students who fall below minimum levels. Special provisions must be made for handicapped children, and extra care must be taken in developing minimum competency tests. (CB)

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THE RAMIFICATIONS OF GRADE RETENTION:

AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

OF THE LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult of the many problems confronting today's educators is the welfare of the low-achieving student. Dedicated professionals, of course, will individualize instruction, devote extra time, and provide an array of unique learning opportunities in an effort to assure adequate educational progress. Unfortunately, due to lack of ability, or motivation, or both, some students resist the best efforts of their instructors.

While still in primary grades these individuals often find themselves two or more years behind their classmates in academic achievement. Teachers are then faced with the dilemma of whether or not to promote the student to the next grade. There are no clear-cut guidelines to follow and the issue is further complicated by the teachers' responsi' 'lities to the educational system as whole, as well as to t' individual student.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest American schools were not organized by grade level, but rather the teacher taught each student whatever she could while he/she attended. Public and governmental concern for a more standardized approach and the introduction of grade-level textbooks led to the development of distinct grade levels around 1848 (William and Walker 1973:55).

The mastery of each grade's skills were considered a prerequisite to success in the next grade. Students who demonstrated proficiency were promoted. Those who didn't could repeat the grade or drop out of school. Non-promotion, then, was used as a means to maintain standards and encourage motivation and respect for diligent work. A high school diploma was evidence that a person had distinguished himself from those that, for whatever reason, had not attained the prescribed level of proficiency (Reiter 1973).

Those forced to repeat grades often quit school, and the excessive dropout rate became a matter of concern. Believing that society benefits from an educated populace, a "keep the students in school" campaign emerged and soon laws requiring children to attend school until reaching a specified age were enacted. Educators were now forced to work with unwilling pupils. The results of grade repetition suddenly took on a new dimension. Unmotivated students often improved very little during the repeat year and non-promotion was often seen as both futile and fruitless. A "move them on" attitude developed and the phenomena of "social promotion" was born (Reiter 1973).

While retention rates for the United States have never been published, the evidence is clear that it has declined appreciably in the last 30 years (William and Walker 1973:53). Whether this is good or bad for the student is not so clear.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With social promotion firmly entrenched, one obvious result is that a number of students are placed in grade levels above their skill level. Results of the IOWA TESTS OF BASIC SKILLS for the Spring of 1983 for grades three and six for Elkhart Community Schools were examined. These scores indicated that over 40% of the more than 750 third graders were performing below grade level in both reading and math. Three percent, or more than 20 students, were already two or more years behind in reading. Similarly, almost half of the 800+ sixth graders were performing below grade level in both reading and math (43% and 46% respectively), and well over 100 of these students were two or more years behind in the development of reading skills. With continued social promotion these students, however unskilled and ill-prepared, will eventually receive a high school diploma and graduate.

This phenomena has not gone unnoticed. Surveys indicate that the leaders of business and industry, as well as the general public, feel that the high school diploma has lost its credibility--"that in no way [does] the high school diploma indicate that the graduate [is] competent in any of the basic academic skills" (Gilman 1978:20). The media has charged that our high schools are turning out large numbers of graduates that are functionally illiterate--and that serious social side effects are feared (Gilman 1978:21). A number

of illiterate graduates have actually brought suit against the school corporations from which they received their diplomas. These incidents have brought about such public concern that two out of three adults favor national standards for high school graduation (Gilman 1978:21).

Many educators feel that social promotion has been a major contributing factor to the overall decline in academic performance and has helped to promote public contempt and distrust of schools. Test results underscore this attitude. Significant declines have occurred in scores from The Scholastic Aptitude Test, The Minnesota Scholastic Test, The Iowa Test of Educational Development, and The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Cawelti 1978:619).

Clearly there is cause for concern. A traditional approach to solving this problem would be stricter policies on non-promotion. Yet it was problems associated with grade repetition that initially led to social promotion policies. And with societies' increasing computerization and high-tech advancements the promotion/retention dilemma faced by the classroom teacher grows more urgent and more complicated.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to review the literature on grade retention and determine the degree of both positive and negative consequences of not promoting a student. Cre-

ative alternatives to standard grade repetition procedures are also examined. To the degree that it is possible, this study seeks to consider the consequences not only for the individual student, but for the larger educational system and for society.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Generally, the literature found either strongly supported non-promotion policies or strongly refuted non-promotion policies; and these two groups, divided accordingly, contain the bulk of the data for this paper. A few studies argued that both positions resulted in undesirable consequences and these, along with articles of related information, comprise a third group, "Supplementary Research."

The research will also be generally identified as belonging to one of four categories. Original research will be identified as being design type I, a comparison of students retained with students promoted under normal school policies; design type II, outcomes of retained students before and after retention; or design type III, a true experimental design where potential retainees are randomly promoted or retained and compared. Jackson (1975) organized a review exclusively around these design types. The fourth category will include reviews of the literature, summaries of individual school programs, or other related information rather

than original research.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It seems unpardonable that educational policies with such enormous impact on individual students and on society have not received ample investigation. Yet both the amount and quality of research on promotion policies has been, at best, perfunctory. "Most of the research available has serious methodological problems that make any conclusions drawn tentative at best," was a typical opening statement from the reviews (Baenen 1980).

The most serious problem was the design of the studies (see organization). Design type I is biased toward promotion. Even after attempting to match students by age, grade level, sex, grades, I.Q., achievement test scores, socio-economic status, etc., the fact that a student was retained indicates that there was a more severe problem.

Design type II is biased toward retention. A student would be expected to make some educational gain during a year. Design type II does not control for outside influences; a multitude of uncontrolled variables, therefore, confound the results. Most of the original research used one of these two designs.

This paper incorporates a representative sample of the literature regarding grade retention. Much of the original

research was done prior to 1960 and, with change in school policies, their relevance could be questioned. Early research not directly available to the author will be considered in reviews. Efforts were made to avoid repetition and to primarily include relatively current works.

ANNOTATIONS

IN SUPPORT OF GRADE RETENTION POLICIES

Ames, Louise Bates, "Retention: A Step Forward," Early Years December 1980, 11:10-11.

(Type II)
Experience and studies from the Gesell Institute of Human Development indicated that emotional harm results only from poorly handled retention cases. The institute advocated promotion based on behavioral age. Ames contended that a child's emotional reaction to retention primarily depends upon how parents break the news. Over 400 parents of students who were retained completed questionnaires, the results of which indicated that 90% felt that the retention was justified and 87% felt that the good outweighed the bad. Eighty-eight percent would make the same decision again. In a separate study, Ames found that retention was rarely accompanied by emotional or social difficulties and usually resulted in improved grades.

Curry, M., "Held Back in Kindergarten," Early Years, December 1982, 13:3-6.

(Type II)
Curry found immaturity to be a valid reason for retaining kindergarten students. Intelligence and maturity are often difficult for parents to separate in young children and Curry stressed that parents should not have guilt feelings because of a kindergarten retention. Curry found that at this level, "a year to grow" usually resulted in both increased confidence and increased performance.

Scott, Betty A., and Ames, Louise Bates, "Improved Academic, Personal, and Social Adjustment in Selected Primary School Repeaters," The Elementary School Journal, May, 1969, 69:431-439.

(Type II)

Performance of twenty-seven retained students attending a public school in Connecticut was examined. Scott found a significant improvement in performance based on grades as reported in Appendix A. As can be seen, there were more A's and B's, and less C's and D's during the retention year than there were the prior year.

Scott developed separate questionnaires for teachers and parents of these retained students and found overall improvement in each of 19 categories such as attitude toward school, contribution to class, peer relationships, health, enthusiasm, etc.

Finlayson, Harry J., "Non Promotion and Self Concept Development," Phi Delta Kappan, November, 1977, 59:205-206.

(Type I & II)

Finlayson conducted a longitudinal study of promoted, non-promoted, and borderline first grade students. Self-concept measurements were taken on four occasions and teachers and parents were asked to fill out questionnaires. Finlayson contended that most studies of self-concept compared promoted with non-promoted students after being matched for age, sex, ability, etc., and that this design established a correlation but not a cause and effect. His study actually showed an increase in self concept after non-promotion based on both the measurements and the questionnaires. (See Appendix B) Furthermore, 91% of the parents reported no stigma attached to their child and reported an improved overall attitude toward school. Finlayson concluded that "non promotion does not appear to negatively influence self concept."

Linduig, Elise, "Grade Retention: Evolving Expectations and Individual Differences," The Clearing House, February, 1983, 56:253-256.

(Review)

Linduig suggested that with the recognition of various learning problems and the need to adapt procedures to meet the individual problems of students that the stigma attached to

repeating a grade may well be a thing of the past. She was discouraged with the studies and stated that they "leave much to be desired in terms of methodology and sophistication." Linduig concluded that the most recent research supported the contention that grade retention can have some very positive results, and outlined specific steps to help make retention a positive experience.

Gilman, D.A., "Logic of Minimum Competency Testing," Education Digest, December, 1978, 44:19-22.

(Review)

After condensing evidence of public dissatisfaction, Gilman outlined a variety of ideas supporting minimum competency testing (requiring students to attain a minimal level of proficiency on a written standardized test before graduating or advancing to the next grade level).

A few of these points are:

1. Curriculum change to real-life skills
2. Standards are absolute regardless of the norms of a particular class
3. Expectations for students are clear and specific
4. Tests are criterion referenced rather than norm referenced--a low percentage fail which is followed by remediation and a retake
5. Hold both teachers and students more accountable

Gilman also examined various school systems involved in minimum competency testing. Denver began in 1959 with a 15% failure rate; the 1976 rate was only 1.5%; and while nationwide SAT'S have declined, Denver's have remained stable. Gary reported test scores up, more parental involvement, and successful remediation programs. Gilman's conclusion: "Minimum competency tests offer meaningful diplomas, reduced illiteracy, and a system of quality control for schools."

Enochs, James C., "Modesto California: A Return to the Four R's," Phi Delta Kappan, May, 1978, 59:609-610.

(Program Summary)

Enochs spoke comtemptuously of the liberal educational reforms of the 1960's: "We had schools without walls, subjects

without substance, electives without requirements, and diplomas without meaning. Test scores went down and everything else went up: truancy, vandalism, dicipline problems, and costs." Modesto, California then began a new program: "Academic Expectations and the Fourth R: Responsibility." Minimum competencies were established in Math, Reading, and Writing for grades K-8; students were tested twice yearly, and special progrmas were set up to help those below standards. Receipt of a high school diploma required passing a test in Math, English, Social Science, Health, and Science. Enochs reported the program working well with great improvements in test scores, attendance, etc. A side benefit was an increase in teacher morale.

Findley, Jim, "Westside's Minimum Competency Graduation Requirements: A Program That Works," Phi Delta Kappan, May, 1978, 59:614-618.

(Program Summary)

This article described the minimum competency requirements for graduation from a high school in Omaha, Nebraska. Planning began in 1972-73 to affect the 1977 graduating class. Testing began in the ninth grade in Reading, Writing, Math, the Democratic Process, Problem Solving, Oral Communication, and Consumerism. Remedial courses were required for those students with low scores. Findley stressed that the emphasis was on early identification and remediation. Legitimacy was added to the diploma not by screening out low students, but rather by screening them in to special programs and providing ample time for all students to attain basic skill levels. Finley reported the program working well based on test scores and student and community response.

Henderson, Donald J., "Gary, Indiana: High School Diplomas with Meaning," Phi Delta Kappan, May, 1978, 59:613-614.

(Program Summary)

Minimum competency requirements for graduation from high school in Reading and Math were implemented in Gary in 1977. There were check point exams in grades 2, 5, and 7, and middle school students that were skill-deficient were given diagnotic tests and assigned to special classes of 15 to 25 pupils. Special classes in high school were limited to 20. Diagnosis and individualized remediation were the key elements in this program. Test scores were not available but Henderson

reported a positive parental reaction and said that teachers felt the program was working very well.

Hart, Gary K., "The California Pupil Proficiency Law as Viewed by Its Author," Phi Delta Kappan, May, 1978, 59:592-596.

(Program Summary)
A former teacher, Hart, wrote the California State Law on minimum competencies. The law had specific requirements for schools while allowing some flexibility. Students were to be tested once in grades 4-6, once in grades 7-9 and twice in grades 10 and 11. The law also required minimum competencies for graduation in Reading, Writing, and Math. Exemptions were allowed for students with diagnosed learning disabilities. Hart reported mixed reactions but a majority of the schools responded favorably and most teachers were supportive and enthusiastic. Test scores were not reported.

Fisher, Thomas H., "Florida's Approach to Competency Testing," Phi Delta Kappan, May, 1978, 59:599-602.

(Program Summary)
Fisher reviewed the events leading up to the 1978-1979 minimum competency testing in Florida including public pressure, media influence, and state legislation including the 1976 Accountability Act. The Florida State-Wide Assessment Program tested students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 and provided remedial help for students scoring below the minimum. "No more social promotion" was the main theme. The first year resulted in failure rates for Math and Communication of 36% and 8% respectively. Despite the high failure rate, Fisher reported that the majority of educators strongly back the concept, and that the requirements have given students an important incentive to learn where little existed before.

Beal, Barry B., "Denver Colorado: A 17-Year Old Minimum Competency Testing Program," Phi Delta Kappan, May, 1978, 59:610-611.

(Program Summary)
Students in Denver have had minimum competency requirements for graduation since 1960. Subjects include Math,

Spelling, Language, and Reading. Those who cannot pass the tests after repeated attempts are given a certificate of attendance rather than a diploma. Beal reported a very high failure rate for the first two years, then it dropped off sharply. After 17 years, Beal reported, the program was very successful in terms of test scores and community acceptance.

Owen, S.A., and Ranick., D.L., "The Greensville Program: A Commonsense Approach to Basics," Phi Delta Kappan, March, 1977, 53:531-533,539.

(Program Summary)

Schools in Greensville, Virginia do not allow social promotion. Standardized tests measure the basic skills and students are promoted when test scores indicate that they have mastered these skills. Retained students are placed in special classes with students their own age rather than with newly promoted students. Owen and Ranick contended that age-based promotions "are a malignancy in our schools" and that the policy promotes student apathy. Owen and Ranick felt "those who need more instruction and more trials than others to master particular skills deserve an extension of time and opportunities to try again. To pass them on when they lack requisite skills is to deny them these opportunities and is, in effect, a cynical denial that they can learn." Very positive results were reported including average achievement test scores jumping from the 30th percentile to the 60th, I.Q. scores up, dropout and retention rates down, and students, teachers, and patrons very happy with the program.

IN OPPOSITION TO GRADE RETENTION POLICIES

Bocks, William M., "Non Promotion: A Year to Grow?" Education Leadership, February, 1977, 34:379-83.

(Review)

This article vehemently attacked all non-promotion policies using phrases such as "devastating psychological consequences" and "educational malpractice". Bocks cited numerous studies and concluded that non-promotion was totally ineffective as an educational tool. Specifically, he stated that non-promotion policies did not insure greater mastery of learning, that harmful psychological consequences resulted, that the range of abilities in later grades was not changed, and that the threat of non-promotion was not an effective motivating force. Bocks acknowledged certain problems

associated with low-achieving students and suggested better individualization of instruction techniques to be the best solution.

Goodlad, John I., "Some Effects of Promotion and Non-Promotion Upon the Social and Personal Adjustment of Children," Journal of Experimental Education, June, 1954, 22:301-328.

(Type I & II)

Goodlad conducted a study of social attitudes in promoted and non-promoted students. He found that promoted students reported significantly less peer rejection than did non-promoted students. Further, he noted a general decline in social attitudes for non-promoted students while the opposite was true of the promoted pupils. He concluded that non-promotion precipitated feelings of rejection and caused a significant decay in the social attitude of retainees.

Caplan, Paula J., "The Role of Classroom Conduct in the Promotion and Retention of Elementary School Children," Journal of Experimental Education, Spring, 1973, 41:8-11.

(Type I)

Caplan examined 50 promoted and retained primary students matched for age, sex, race, etc; forty were boys, ten were girls. She concluded that classroom conduct was a critical consideration in promotion and retention for girls. "Aggressiveness [in girls] counters sexual norms and effects teachers' judgments. Further, Caplan found that retention rarely helped to achieve the desired educational goals for girls or boys.

Arthur, Grace, "A Study of Achievement of 60 Grade 1 Repeaters as Compared with that of Non-Repeaters of the Same Mental Age," Journal of Experimental Education, December, 1936, 5:203-205.

(Type I)

Arthur compared achievement scores of 60 first grade non-promoted students with scores of promoted students after matching for I.Q. Arthur reported that usually the non-promoted pupils learned no more in two years than promoted pupils of the same I.Q. learned in one. This less recent study (1936) is typical of the research conducted in the early 1900's.

Wise, Arthur E., "Minimum Competency Testing: Another Case of Hyper-Rationalization," Phi Delta Kappan, May, 1978, 59:596-598.

(Review)
The main point of this article against minimum competency testing was that the link between the intended goal (improved education) and the means (minimum competency testing) is based on illogical and unsubstantiated assumptions. Wise offered no statistics and relied heavily on complicated rhetoric and double talk. Wise made three recommendations: 1) higher levels of government should be concerned with promoting educational opportunities, 2) the establishment of standards should be the local school board's responsibility, and 3) serious research on problems of poor learning and poor teaching is required.

Glass, Gene V., "Minimum Competency and Incompetence in Florida," Phi Delta Kappan, May, 1978, 59:602-605.

(Review)
Glass strongly criticized the Florida minimum competency test, not because of rationale or concept, but because of the "hurried way" that the program was developed. According to Glass, the construction of the instrument was very suspect and the establishment of minimum scores was totally arbitrary. Glass predicted that Florida's minimum competency test would not last one year. (At present, the Functional Literacy Test requirement has continued.)

Tyler, R.W., "Impact of Minimum Competency Testing in Florida," Today's Education, September and October, 1978, 67:30-38.

(Review)
Tyler reported on a study conducted by a National Education Association panel. The panel was appointed to examine the impact of Florida's minimum competency test. The panel's main criticism was the haste in development and the questionable implementation of the test. The panel also brought out several negative points of state-wide minimum competency testing in principle. Special education students are special cases that must be dealt with. Lowering some higher-achieving students' goals was a concern. Enforcing state-wide requirements has the effect of removing the choice of curriculum

from local school districts. As a group, blacks always do worse on written exams so it could be predicted that many blacks will fail the test. A more fair and appropriate means of assessment was suggested.

William J., and Walker R., "The Slow Progress Student in Graded and Non Graded Programs," Peabody Journal of Education, April, 1973, 50:52-58.

(Type I)

William and Walker studied the effects of non-promotion by comparing the level of achievement, attitude toward school, and self concepts of retained students with those of promoted students. They found that both the immediate and long term effects of non-promotion were more harmful than helpful. This was true regardless of the grade level in question. They concluded that alternatives to non-promotion should be developed and utilized.

Koons, Clair L., "Non Promotion: A Dead End Road," Phi Delta Kappan, May, 1977, 58:701-702.

(Review)

In a scathing rebuttle to Owen and Ranick (1977), Koons stated: "For every student who may possibly benefit from non-promotion, there are two or more who are not helped and are possibly harmed." Koons acknowledged the problem of meaningless diplomas, but felt that the "complex promotion problem [could] not be solved with simple answers such as [minimum competency testing]. In regard to the "impressive results" of the Greenville program, Koons offered speculative suggestions for the "high but misleading test results." He cited Kowitz and Armstrong (1961) where a higher overall achievement level was found in schools with strict promotion policies when compared with those of liberal promotion policies. The higher overall achievement was found to be at the expense of the lower achievers--that the lower achievers actually did better in the schools with liberal promotion policies. Koons stated that even with extensive retention that student abilities remain heterogeneous; that teachers must make allowances for individual differences; that low achievers should be given work they can handle within age-grouped classes. Koons' main point: "Make the schools fit the students--not the students fit the schools."

Reiter, Robert G., The Promotion/Retention Delemma: What Research Tells Us, Educational Resources Information Center, Ed 099 412, Philadelphia School District Office of Research and Evaluation, December, 1973.

(Review)

Reiter examined two policy extremes: 1) Rigid retention-in-grade for those deficient in achievement, and 2) Automatic promotion for all students. He found that the way in which a pupil was promoted or retained was more important than if he was. "The role of the educator," stated Reiter, "is no less critical than the policy maker. The key question is humane treatment for the child." Regardless of grade level, appropriate learning tasks where the individual can experience success is vital. Reiter found neither extreme to be a panacea. He concluded that most studies indicate retention to be a futile practice and that there seemed to be far fewer disadvantages with an automatic promotion policy.

Cawelti, Gordon, "National Competency Testing: A Bogus Solution," Phi Delta Kappan, May, 1978, 59:619-621.

(Review)

Cawelti vehemently attacked the idea of minimum competency testing. "A majority of students who are retained in grade as a result of failing competency tests will either not improve their performance or will actually do worse," he insisted. Another major concern was minority performance. Cawelti confirmed that the Functional Literacy Test in Florida showed a much higher failure rate for minority students. If these students are tracked into special classes a "separate but unequal dual education system" would be recreated. He concluded that teachers know what they are doing and that, as a rule, they do not see much value in retaining students.

Godfrey, Ernestine, "The Tragedy of Failure," Education Digest, January, 1972, 37:34-35.

(Type I)

A 1970 research project conducted by the North Carolina Advancement School examined 1,200 students in grades 6 and 7 from 14 different schools to determine characteristics of repeaters and non-repeaters. The study examined reading and math achievement, self-concept, and achievement responsibility. Godfrey reported repeaters scoring lower than non-repeaters

in every category. In addition, the more grades a student had repeated, the lower the scores. The intellectual achievement responsibility measurement showed repeaters blamed failures on outside forces over which they had no control. Godfrey concluded that grade retention does not achieve the desired ends of improved academic achievement and, in fact, results in detrimental effects on self concept and attitude toward school. She concluded that alternatives to grade retention must be found.

SUPPLEMENTARY RESEARCH

Baenen, Nancy R., And Others, A Research Summary: The Effects of Grade Retention on Elementary Students, Educational Resources Information Center, Ed 196 556, n. pub., n.p., November, 1980.

(Review)

This article summarized a comparitively thorough review of Eric documents, literature reviews, and journal articles which dealt with the promotion/retention question.

According to Baenen, policies of social promotion emerged, to a small extent, during the 1950's, and became widespread during the 60's and 70's. [Coincidentally this is also the period of time in which test scores dropped significantly nationwide.] Baenen stated that at that time there were "more studies which support the view that grade retention is not more beneficial than promotion for students with academic problems." She discussed the "serious methodological problems" of most of the studies and indicated that further research was necessary. She found studies that indicated that some students benefited, some did worse, and some showed no change as a result of retention. Baenen concluded that the research to date was inconclusive as to whether it is better to promote or retain low-achieving pupils.

Neill, S.B., "Summary of Issues in the Minimum Competency Movement, 1st Annual Conference on Student Competencies," Phi Delta Kappan, February, 1979, 60:452-453.

(Review)

Neill made no comment as to the educational merits or dificiencies of minimum competency testing but concentrated

on the legal issues involved with such policies. He outlined four main areas of legal concern: 1) adequacy of phase in period, 2) the match between the tests and the curriculum, 3) the discriminatory effects on minority students, and 4) the treatment of the handicapped.

Brown, Ernest L., "Retention: The Team Approach," The Clearing House, April, 1981, 54:348-349.

(Related information)

Brown discussed do's and don'ts of retaining a pupil in grade. The considerations were specific to the individual case and did not make policy suggestions. She emphasized getting several school personnel involved in the decision and to evaluate alternatives carefully. Brown outlined a specific eight step procedure for considering a student for grade retention. The process is a continuous, ongoing, time-consuming task if proper consideration is given. The major emphasis here was to maintain clear and continuous communication between the home and school.

Thompson, M., "Social Promotion: Going, Going...Gone?" Education Digest, April, 1979, 44:11-13.

(Related information)

Thompson indicated that the present trend of educational policy suggested not whether minimum competency testing would infiltrate most public school systems, but how soon it would happen and how well it would be done. As evidence to support his contentions, he cited the Greensville, Virginia program that initially failed 1,300 students in 1974, but left the policy intact despite this. He claimed the public was insisting on accountability and skilled graduates, and that the minimum competency test was politically right for the times. Thompson's biggest concern was the fear of poor programs being developed due to lack of adequate funding. He divided the costs between the three main components: test development, test administration, and remedial costs. Thompson figured that when done properly, development costs would average $100 per item, resulting in total development costs of up to $100,000 per locality. Administration costs would be difficult to determine but costs for remediation could be staggering. Thompson estimated that remedial costs could run as high as 50-100 million dollars or even higher statewide. Thompson feared that the vital element, remedial programs, would be ill-

furnished and inadequate due to insufficient funding.

Jackson, Greg B., "The Research Evidence on the Effects of Grade Retention," Review of Educational Research, Fall, 1975, 45:613-635.

(Review)

Jackson conducted the most comprehensive review of the research available to the author. This exhaustive study covered virtually all education articles and books from the early 1900's through mid 1973 that dealt with grade retention. While specific details of the studies were not discussed, 44 original research studies were summarized and organized into the three design types as discussed earlier (see organization). The results of this analysis were also presented in table format as shown in Appendix C. As was predicted, design type I research showed promotion of pupils to be more beneficial while design type II showed retention to be more beneficial. The four studies using the true experimental design, type III, failed to provide conclusive data (see Appendix D). Jackson concluded that there was "no reliable body of evidence to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for students with serious academic or adjustment difficulties.

SUMMARY

Policies of social promotion have resulted in students being placed two or more grades above their actual level of achievement. This, in turn, brought about unskilled and illiterate high school graduates, a degree of public contempt for education, and loss of credibility for the high school diploma (Gilman 1978).

While certain social problems associated with large scale social promotion seem clear, the consequences of grade retention remains an extremely polarized issue. Bocks, Caplan,

Godfrey, Goodlad, and William and Walker all found grade retention to have emotionally damaging consequences. In these studies and reviews, promoted and non-promoted pupils were compared, and non-promoted students were found to have a more negative attitude toward school (Bocks, Goodlad, William and Walker), a lower self-concept (Godfrey, Goodlad, William and Walker), and greater problems with peer relationships (Goodlad).

Conversely, many studies showed improvements in social adjustment following non-promotion. Curry reported more self-confidence for kindergarten repeaters. Ames, and separately, Scott and Ames, both found improved peer group relations following grade retention. A higher self-concept accompanied by an improved attitude toward school was found by Ames, Finlayson, and Scott and Ames.

Several studies also indicated improved academic achievement. Scott and Ames found improved letter grades while Beal, Enochs, Finley, Gilman, and Owen and Ranick all report programs of rigid retention policies or minimum competency requirements where standardized test scores had improved.

Indications that non-promotion policies did not improve academic performance, and in fact sometimes caused a decline, were reported by Baenen, Bocks, Caplan, Godfrey, Koons, and William and Walker. Bocks, Godfrey, and Koons also found the threat of non-promotion not to be a motivating force.

Furthermore, Bocks and Koons stated that grade retention policies did not result in a narrower range of abilities in upper grades. Cawelti found liberal promotion policies were superior to rigid ones, as did Reiter, Tyler, and Wise.

While Enochs, Findley, Gilman, Henderson, and Owen and Ranick all report successful minimum competency programs with special remedial classes for students shown to be skill deficient, they fail to mention special concerns for minority students.

Cawelti and Tyler both pointed out a much higher failure rate for blacks on Florida's Functional Literacy Exam and raised the question of recreating a "separate and unequal dual education system." The adequacy of the phase in period, the match between tests and curriculum, and special concerns for handicapped students were other considerations associated with minimum competency testing (Neill).

Thompson considered problems of cost involved with adequate programs of minimum competency testing. He estimated that costs for test development, test administration, and student remediation could run into billions of dollars nationwide.

Finally, the most comprehensive critical review available was conducted by Jackson. Jackson's survey of the literature from the early 1900's through mid 1973 included 44 original research studies. Jackson, along with Baenen and Lindwig,

found the methodology of most of these studies to be unsound. Jackson concluded that the research did not confirm promotion or retention to be more beneficial.

CONCLUSION

Social problems associated with unskilled high school graduates has become a public concern. Social promotion has been a major contributing factor to this phenomena, yet most teachers are reluctant to retain a student in grade.

Most research has shown this to be a responsible position in view of the pupil's educational welfare. There appears to be more studies that indicate that the low-achieving student will do at least as well, if not better, if he is promoted than if he is retained.

A major criticism of standard grade retention programs is that there is seldom special help, and that the student who is forced to repeat a grade does just that--repeats his/her initial bad experience. While advocates of social promotion maintain that individualization would do much to alleviate the problem, it is clear that this is not happening. Perhaps, with increased demands on teachers, many are unable to give low-achievers the amount of attention they need to realize adequate intellectual gains. There is certainly agreement that students should be given learning tasks commensurate with their skills, enabling them to experience

success and to be challenged to continue. Special diagnostic/ remedial programs could insure these pupils the extra instructional time they need for this success.

Virtually all of the schools with strict promotion policies and comparitively high scores on standardized tests have incorporated both minimum competency tests and remedial bridging programs as a part of those policies. In this way the standards are absolute from teacher to teacher, and from year to year; accountability and quality control are maintained. And while the student is held responsible for his educational progress, he is assured that special help will be available if and when it is needed. The public, also, is assured that a high school graduate has attained at least an adequate level in the basic skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. At local levels, minimum standards of achievement should be developed and utilized for promotion from kindergarten, graduation from high school, and frequent, if not all, grade promotions between.

2. Diagnostic/remedial bridging rooms should be established for those students who fall below the minimum levels, and provisions should be made for partial promotions and immediate return to regular classes when standards have been achieved.

3. Students who repeatedly fall below minimum standards should be given the option to attend special classes with adjusted skill requirements. Students graduating from this program should receive diplomas that reflect this.

4. Special provisions for handicapped students should be included in the policy.

5. Care should be taken during development and implementation to assure that: a) the tests measure real-life skills, b) that the curriculum matches the tests, and c) that there is an adequate phase in period.

A valid criticism of these recommendations is that if, as would be predicted, a disproportionately high rate of minority students were tracked into the remedial classes, a dual educational system could result. In larger systems this could be at least partially eradicted and great care should be taken to eliminate any questions that are potentially, racially biased.

This program would renew the lost confidence in public schools by guaranting a minimum skill level proficiency of their graduates. Low-achieving students would not be asked to repeat a grade, but rather they would be given special help that would provide more benefit than either promotion or retention under traditional policies. At the same time it would provide additional motivation for students to learn, further increasing the educational benefit.

As is the case with most things in life, the bottow line here is money. As we have seen, the cost of such a program

would not be small. Historically, society has been reluctant to provide adequate funding for educational needs. Until we are ready to pay for the special help that low-achieving students need and deserve, teachers will be faced with a decision for which the research is inconclusive.

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APPENDIX A

Letter Grade Distribution Prior and Subsequent to Retention
(Scott, Betty A., and Ames, Louise Bates, 1969)

Grade	Year Prior To Retention	Year Subsequent To Retention
A	0	3
B	3	18
C	13	4
D	9	0

APPENDIX B

Appendix B-1. Per Cent of Teacher Responses to Questionnaire Falling in Various Categories* (Finlayson, 1977)

Question	Very Low	Low	Average	High	Very High
1. What is his attitude toward school this year?	0	6	*58*	21	15
2. Does child contribute to the group in a positive manner?	0	0	46	*42*	12
3. Is he enthusiastic about what he is learning?	0	3	*49*	39	9
4. Did child make a good emotional adjustment to repeating?	0	9	15	15	*61*
5. Is there absence of stress in his response in the classroom?	0	0	18	*33*	49
6. How have other children in the class reacted to his repeating the grade?	0	0	27	*27*	46
7. How does he get along with the other children?	0	6	18	*30*	46
8. Does child complete his work in school?	0	0	12	36	*52*
9. To what degree is he working up to his ability?	0	3	*64*	24	9
10. Has repeating the grade been helpful to this child?	0	0	12	*46*	42

* The median response to each item is in the category that has an italicized entry.

Appendix B-2. Mothers' Responses to Questionnaire about Children's Adjustment to Repeating* (Finlayson, 1977)

Question	Mean Rating First Year	Mean Rating Second Year	Mean Difference	t
1. Which answer best describes your child's attitude toward school: hated it, disliked it, tolerated it, liked it a little, liked it a lot?	3.7	4.7	1.0	5.57†
2. How did your child feel about his work in school: happy, confident, sometimes unhappy, discouraged, always discouraged?	3.7	4.4	1.4	5.43†
3. As far as you know, was your child able to finish his written work in school: never, not often, sometimes, usually, always?	2.9	4.4	1.5	6.81†
4. How did your child get along with others in his class: great difficulty, some difficulty, little difficulty, fairly well, very well?	4.2	4.4	0.2	2.26‡
5. Was your child tired when he came home from school: very tired, quite tired, sometimes, rarely, never?	3.3	4.2	0.9	6.86†
6. Did your child have trouble getting ready for school: daily, almost daily, sometimes, slight dawdling, looked forward to going?	3.3	4.3	1.0	5.65†
7. How has your child's health been: very poor, quite poor, fairly good, good, excellent?	4.0	4.4	.04	2.05
8. Did your child complain of stomach aches and/or headaches: always, often, sometimes, rarely, never?	3.8	4.3	0.5	1.49
9. Has your child's sense of responsibility improved: none, little, some, good improvement, great improvement?	2.4	4.9	2.5	11.95†

* To test these responses statistically for each question, the most positive answer was assigned a numerical value of 5; the remaining answers were assigned decreasing values to 1.

† t significant at .01 level (t 2.78).

‡ t significant at .05 level (t 2.06).

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APPENDIX C

The Number of Tabulated Results in Each Reviewed Study of Grade Retention, by Type of Design, by Kind of Criterion Variable Used, and by the Direction and Significance of the Result. (Jackson, 1975)

		Design Type I										*Design Type II*										*Design Type III*				
		Achievement					*Adjustment*					*Achievement*					*Adjustment*					*Achievement*				
Study		(−−)	(−)	(0)	(+)	(++)	(−−)	(−)	(0)	(+)	(++)	(−−)	(−)	(0)	(+)	(++)	(−−)	(−)	(0)	(+)	(++)	(−−)	(−)	(0)	(+)	(++)
Keyes	(1911)											0	0	0	0	6										
Klene & Branson	(1929)																					0	1	0	1	0
Mackintosh	(1931)											0	0	0	0	1										
McElwee	(1932)						3	9	0	2	0															
Cheyney & Boyer	(1933)	0	1	0	0	0						0	0	0	1	0										
Arthur	(1936)	0	4	1	2	0																				
Farley	(1936)																					1	0	0	5	0
Anfinson	(1941)	1	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	3	0															
Cook	(1941)																					0	16	0	16	0
Myers	(1942)											0	0	0	1	0										
Sandin	(1944)						17	3	0	0	0															
Russel	(1952)																1	2	2	5	8					
Goodlad	(1954)						1	4	0	0	0															
Lobdell	(1954)											0	0	0	0	1										
Wallihan	(1955)	1	0	0	0	0																				
Coeffield & Bloomers	(1956)	3	33	1	22	1						0	0	0	2	23										
Anderson	(1957)	0	0	0	2	0	0	5	0	8	0															
Stringer	(1960)											0	0	0	0	1										
Worth	(1960)	2	3	0	2	1	0	2	0	7	2															
Kowitz & Armstrong	(1961)	1	1	0	0	0																				
Kamii & Weikart	(1963)	4	0	0	0	0																				
Chansky	(1964)	2	2	0	0	0	0	3	0	8	1															
Briggs	(1966)	6	0	0	0	0	2	6	0	6	0															
Dobbs & Neville	(1967)	4	0	0	0	0																				
Chase	(1968)																0	0	0	0	14					
Gaite	(1969)											0	0	0	0	35										
Scott & Ames	(1969)											0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	7					
Reinhers & Griffin	(1970)											0	0	0	0	1										
Reinhers & Griffin	(1971)	0	1	0	1	0																				
White & Howard	(1973)						4	5	0	0	0															

Note. The symbols in the heading indicate the following:

(−−) = statistically significant results favoring the promotion of pupils or showing losses from retention
(−) = nonstatistically significant results favoring the promotion of pupils or showing losses from retention
(0) = no differences
(+) = nonstatistically significant results favoring the retention of pupils or showing gains from retention
(++) = statistically significant results favoring the retention of pupils or showing gains from retention

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APPENDIX D

Results of Studies Comparing Experimentally Promoted and Retained Pupils (Design Type III) (Jackson, 1975)

Type of Result	*Number of Times Result Occurred for Each Criterion*
	Achievement
(a) statistically significant difference favoring promoted pupils	1
(b) nonstatistically significant difference favoring promoted pupils	17
(c) no difference between promoted and retained pupils	0
(d) nonstatistically significant difference favoring retained pupils	22
(e) statistically significant difference favoring retained pupils	0